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INDIAN UNITY.

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THREE SIGNIFICANT PHASES OF INDIAN UNITY ARE DISCUSSED. THE BASIC FAMILY AND TRIBAL UNITY WHICH HAS ALWAYS EXISTED AMONG INDIANS IS NOW EXTENDING INTO INTRA-TRIBAL OR INDIAN UNITY. CLOSELY LINKED TO THIS CHANGE, BUT NOT EASILY DISCERNIBLE, IS THE GROWING ANGLO-INDIAN UNITY. THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE, BUT THE UNDERLYING FEATURE OF THE INDIAN'S DESIRE TO BE A WHOLE MAN IN OUR WORLD INDICATES THE MOVEMENT TOWARD COHESIVENESS INTO THE AMERICAN SOCIETY. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN THE "JOURNAL OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION," VOL. 3, NO. 3, MAY 1964, PP. 1-8. (WN)

INDIAN UNITY*

J. E. Officer

Those who labor for a period in any business or profession—and I include the Indian business in this broad category—tend to develop what Professor John Kenneth Galbraith refers to as a "conventional wisdom," or a collection of cliches about those phenomena upon which they direct their attention. Many of these notions contain more than a grain of truth, but what distinguishes them is the fact that they are so readily accepted without concern for whether or not they are true.

The other day I was reading through one of the many tribal newspapers which I try to scan regularly, and I came across some statements which challenge the truth of one element of the conventional wisdom of specialists in the field of Indian affairs. This familiar cliche is that "Indians are slow to accept culture change." Needless to say, there have been many times during my short tenure in the Indian Bureau when I have been perfectly content to accept this statement as "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. . . ." Yet, let us look for a moment at what the record shows. The tribal newspaper which I mentioned included, among many other fine features, a long and, I think, an intelligent and salutory editorial—warning the tribal members against demanding another per capita payment from their still large but dwindling tribal estate. "After over a decade of getting yearly grants from the Tribe," the editor wrote, "the members are generally not much better off than they were before they got the money. They are still poor in money, but they are also poor socially, educationally, morally and in other ways."

My first reaction to this was, "Well, Indians don't change much, do they?" And yet, I reminded myself, this was also evidence of great change. Here was a well-written editorial opposing per capita payments in the official newspaper of one of our most conservative tribes. And this newspaper, sponsored by the Tribal Council, went on to say that what is needed instead of per capita payments is "profitable employment to the end that each person is using his skills, talents, creative ability, imagination, and energy to earn his own living and to achieve those things which make for a happy, comfortable, and satisfied life."

I doubt if such an editorial could have appeared in a tribal newspaper a generation ago, even assuming that such a well-edited tribal newspaper existed.

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* This article is an untitled speech presented by Dr. Officer at the Arizona Indian Education Association, Phoenix, Arizona, March 20, 1964. The theme of the conference was Indian Unity.

Then I glanced at a news story in an adjoining column. Here I learned that the average daily attendance of the tribe's children in public schools had risen from 78% to 93% in the years from 1958 to 1962. "Another striking fact," the news story continued, "is the change from one high school graduate in 1958 to 25 graduates in 1963. Again this reflects not only changes in the behavior of the students themselves but changes in the behavior of parents, tribal administrators, school personnel and, in short, anyone in contact with the Tribe in any way."

My first recation was that this tribe must enjoy a particularly enlightened leadership and peculiarly good relations with the county people who operate the public schools the Indian children attend. In sum, this must be a specially favorable situation for the educational development of an Indian group. And then I recalled the statement the other day of Mrs. Hildegarde Thompson, Chief of the Bureau's Branch of Education, that the average daily attendance of Indian children in Bureau schools has risen from 77% to 89% in the last 20 years, and that, while the number of Indians in college was so small in 1944 that no records were maintained, in 1963, about 20 years later, 3,141 Indians were attending colleges or universities and 2,290 others were enrolled in post-high school vocational schools. So the situation on this particular reservation was not unusual and by no means unique. It was simply representational of an upward curve in education that virtually all Indian groups in the country have enjoyed in recent years.

By this time, some of you may have guessed the identity of the tribe from whose newspaper I have been quoting, but I doubt that many of you have. It is the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in Utah. It consists of the full-blood members of the old Ute tribe who remained under Federal trusteeship after Federal trusteeship of the mixed-blood members was terminated in 1961. One might properly expect the full-bloods to be conservative and to resist change; and yet their Tribal Business Committee—which is the Utes' tribal council—is one of the most forward-looking in the country, and the *Ute Bulletin* is an excellent, progressive journal.

As with glib statements about the resistance of Indians to change, we are given to comment carelessly at times on the subject of "Indian Unity", which is the theme of this year's Arizona Indian Education Conference. Actually, unity *per se* is not necessarily a virtue. There have been and still are movements among the American Indians which call upon dislike and mistrust to promote unity for purposes which in the long run are likely to do Indians more harm than good. Such movements usually accentuate the peculiar ethnic and social status of Indians in ways which widen the gulf between them and their neighbors.

When people are motivated to join with others of similar interest, they customarily do so to achieve new privileges for themselves or to defend ones which they already have. From the Ghost Dance movement of the late 1800's to the modern inter-tribal councils, Indians have placed more stress than most other American minorities on organizing for status defense—that is, on achieving unity in order to retain the one status most important to them, that of "Indian-ness". The American Negro, on the other hand, with whom they are often improperly compared, has sought unity for the purpose of changing his status which carries with it numerous disadvantages. I think Indians are more aware of the differences between themselves and other minorities in this regard than are most Americans.

For any person—not just for Indians—the concept of unity has several dimensions. There is basically the unity of the family, for which Indians in this society are noted. Then, there is the unity of the community, a term which may be as broad as an entire geographic region, or as narrow as a neighborhood. In traditional terms, the Indian community was usually the band, although occasionally it encompassed several bands which were organized together as a tribe. Treaty and conquest introduced the Indians to a new kind of community—the reservation. It, and most especially the conferring of citizenship which belatedly accompanied it, also brought the Indian into the traditional political structures of his white neighbors—the town, the county, the state, and the nation. To greater or lesser degree, unity at all these levels has certain advantages for Indians. However, as the Indian proceeds from the family level to that of the nation, the advantages tend to be greater if this concept of unity is broadened to embrace others besides his fellow Indians.

From the standpoint of Indian unity, the establishment of reservations was a significant and traumatic event. Rigorous and often unjust as the reservation was, it did cause some tribes to attain a new and deeper sense of identity and group consciousness. Unfortunately, in some cases it caused others to lose theirs.

The reservation era may be said to have begun in the 1830's with the removal of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes from the Southeast to Indian Territory, now the State of Oklahoma. These early reservations were not under the administration of resident agents or superintendents. The Five Tribes continued to develop strong, sophisticated leadership and to operate under their Anglo-American type of political institutions in Oklahoma. The influence of highly acculturated mixed-blood leaders among the Creeks and Cherokees, for example, who were nevertheless well aware of the conservatism of many of their followers, resulted in the really surprisingly good adjustment these tribes made following their removal.

Later effects of the reservation system, however, were not so productive. In the latter part of the 19th century the practice of establishing resident superintendents, at that time called agents, was begun. During this period an almost complete breakdown of aboriginal political forms occurred. All functions of government were performed by the agent and his staff. About all that was accomplished in the way of tribal unity or tribal consciousness was achieved through the mere physical situation of living together in defeat and near starvation. That the tribes maintained and, in some instances, *gained* unity and self-identity through this ordeal is a tribute to the Indians' capacity for self-perpetuation.

These were the drab years when the Federal Government, often at the instigation of the best-intentioned people, attempted to destroy the tribes as political entities through the fractionization of their peoples and the allotment of their lands. These policies, combined with paternalistic administration on the reservations centering about the distribution of rations, halted for many years the development of effective native government and leadership.

But thanks to the Citizenship Act of 1924, the Meriam Report of 1928, and, most importantly, the policy changes introduced by John Collier's administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930's and symbolized by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, a turn towards reservation unity and responsible reservation government became evident in the mid-20th Century.

Not only did tribes with clearly homogeneous backgrounds establish new procedures for self-government, but numerous Indian groups composed of two or more bands of differing tribal origins successfully united in a single, new tribal government. Notable examples of this latter development were the organization into one body of the "Three Affiliated Tribes" (Gros Ventre, Arikara, and Mandan) of the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota and of such other heterogeneous Indian groups as the Hoopa Valley Tribe in California, the Warm Springs Tribes in Oregon, and the Pyramid Lake Paiutes in Nevada.

Here in Arizona there have been at least two notable instances of the ability—almost the surprising ability—of Indian groups of scattered or different components to make a success of unified tribal government. One is an Apache group which is historically little more than a conglomeration of bands having only a small degree of political unity. Yet today, organized under the somewhat artificial name of "The White Mountain Apache Tribe", it boasts an excellent government with its legal and administrative machinery operating in an admirable manner.

Equally remarkable has been the unification of the much larger Navaho Tribe in the last 40 years. Although possessing the unifying influence of a common language and a common ethnic heritage, the Navaho did not constitute a political entity a century ago. A scattered, roving people, their political organization did not extend beyond local bands led by headmen. Much of the difficulty U. S. military commanders had in dealing with them after our acquisition of their territory through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 arose from their inability to find any government with which to deal.

In the 1920's oil was discovered on the reservation. The Bureau organized a small "business council" to represent the tribe in the negotiation of leases. From this informal organization of doubtful legality gradually evolved the present Tribal Council which, democratically elected, now governs 85,000 Navaho and authorizes the expenditures of many millions of dollars annually.

We do not have time this evening to identify and assess the many factors, external as well as internal, which have contributed to this conspicuous instance of the development of tribal unity. But that it was connected with and influenced by definite and discernible cultural changes among the Navaho is apparent. The process of change and adjustment has been steadily at work both as between separate clans within the larger Navaho family and between the Navaho and the outside world.

Because of their loyalty to their language, to scattered settlements, to sheep husbandry and to other aspects of their traditional way of life, the Navaho are regarded by most outsiders as an extremely conservative people. But, as Clyde Kluckhohn and Evan Vogt have pointed out, they actually provide an outstanding example of an "absorbing" or "borrowing" culture.

From the Spanish conquistadores they took the horse and the sheep. From the Pueblo and Ute Indians and from Spanish and Anglo-American Christianity, they have absorbed certain beliefs and ceremonies into their religious life. And, in economics and technology, they have been quick to incorporate such new enterprises as weaving, silversmithing, and wage labor, and to utilize, whenever financially possible, the automobile and the pick-up truck.

But equally notable has been the development, across the many miles of desert, mesas, and mountains, of a sense of belongingness or unity which now goes far beyond family ties and loyalties. The Navaho living near Shiprock, New Mexico, now usually has a distinct feeling of identity with the Navaho living, let us say, in Tuba City, Arizona, 150 miles away. No doubt the possession of a common language remains the greatest, single unifying force, but certainly all the educational experiences which the modern Navaho undergoes today both in and out of school must also contribute to the process.

The Pimas and Maricopas of the Gila and Salt River Reservations provide another instance in Arizona of growing tribal unity. But because they have lived and worked together for centuries in settled, agricultural communities, their progress in organizing a workable tribal government does not seem so remarkable. Their accomplishments, for the most part quietly achieved, should not be overlooked.

We would not be honest if we did not recognize that a few Arizona tribes still have a long way to go before acquiring unity and successful self-government. The Hopis, many of them stoutly loyal to their clan or village, are still lamentably divided between conservatives and progressives—a situation which not only impairs the effectiveness of their internal arrangements but also handicaps their relationship with other tribes. The Papagos, scattered like the Navahos over a vast and mostly unproductive reservation, remain in large measure separated into family or dialect groups and are having difficulty in achieving a feeling of mutual identification and responsibility.

But, taking the country as a whole, I am certain that much evidence could be produced to show that American Indian tribes generally, whether composed of one ethnic stock or derived from several, are achieving unity within themselves. What is more, I believe they are learning the arts of representational government and acquiring the ability to deal, as organized communities, with other political entities such as counties and States.

As to the development of unity, or at least of affiliation, among Indian tribes or groups throughout the country, the signs are also encouraging. Although we have seen nothing in recent years as highly developed as the 18th century Iroquois Confederacy of New York, we must remember that this was essentially a military alliance which, in its last few years, was nurtured by a British government as a valuable ally against the French in Canada. After the Revolution, the United States continued for a few decades to deal with the Iroquois, or Six Nations, as a group, but with the rapid white settlement of western New York and the Northwest Territory, the political power of the Confederacy waned. While through its member tribes it continues to have thousands of loyal adherents, today it is largely a fraternal organization.

On the other hand, such an ancient organization as the All-Pueblo Council, considered by some to be the oldest mutual defense league in the Western Hemisphere, has grown in prestige and influence. Reorganized at Santo Domingo in 1922, it holds regular meetings, has several employees, and is invariably consulted by Bureau officials in regard to any major matter affecting the Pueblo Indians.

The last few decades have also seen the organization in 1944 of the National Congress of American Indians and its rise to considerable political influence in the country. The All-American Indian Conference at the Uni-

versity of Chicago in 1961 was another notable event in what might be called the Indian ecumenical movement. An interesting development of the past year was the organization of the National Indian Youth Council with headquarters in Denver. This new organization differs from the National Congress of American Indians in some respects. Most of the NCAI's officers and directors are, of course, tribal councilmen from the tribes which constitute the Congress. The Youth Council, in contrast, seems to be deriving most of its leadership from younger Indians who have not participated in tribal affairs. They are a vigorous, well-educated group and seem, at the moment at least, interested in taking direct action in the Indians' behalf rather than using the traditional channels of publicizing the Indian cause before the U. S. Congress in Washington.

In this connection, we should not overlook the fact that with over 3,000 Indian young people now attending college the opportunities for inter-tribal contacts at this formative age have become more numerous. Many Western universities, such as Arizona State University, have Indian student clubs which stimulate the discussion of problems and conditions on the reservations and the serious consideration of ways and means of improving them.

Another significant development on the national scene is the really amazing proliferation of Indian-interest publications in recent years. These range in size, content, and regularity of publication from the *Ute Bulletin,* which I mentioned early in my talk, to modest, mimeographed newsletters which seem to appear only when the editor has the time and energy to write and run one off. "Indian Voices", itself a new publication edited by Robert K. Thomas of the University of Chicago, in its February issue printed a list of local and national publications concerned with Indian matters. According to my count, they numbered 77, including a dozen or so published in Canada. Perhaps, at long last, the Indians are achieving a press of their own. If they are, its importance as a unifying influence cannot be over-estimated.

The prosperous continuance of such annual get-togethers as the Gallup Ceremonials in New Mexico and the All-American Indian Days in Sheridan, Wyoming may not have much political significance, but their contribution to the development of social relations between the tribes and informal exchanges of information and ideas should not be discounted. Indeed, the Indians' seemingly universal adoption of the automobile has obviously reduced the distance between reservations and greatly increased the speed and efficiency of the "moccasin telegraph".

A sub-dimension to tribal unity within the United States is the question of unity among the Indians—or indigenous peoples, as our neighbors to the South sometimes call them—of all the American countries. During John Collier's administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Inter-American Indian Institute was established in 1940 by an agreement signed by the United States and a number of Latin-American countries. Initially this organization stimulated much interest throughout the hemisphere, but the Indians of most of the Latin countries were so socially and culturally isolated that they did not achieve effective participation.

After Mr. Collier's departure from the Bureau in 1945, the United States' interest in the Institute languished, and what leadership has been provided to it since that time has come almost entirely from Mexico. In the last five years a vigorous young Mexican historian, Dr. Miguel Leon-Portilla, a specialist in the study of the Aztec Indians, has assumed direction of the

Institute. Under his leadership it has achieved a new lease on life. Ably assisting him as the American delegate is a man well known to most of you, Dr. William H. Kelly of the University of Arizona.

Commissioner Nash and I feel that the Institute can make an important contribution to improving the standard of living of Indians throughout the hemisphere, and we both hope that in the coming years we can persuade the tribes in this country to take a greater interest in the affairs of their fellow-Indians in Canada and in the countries to the South. I strongly urge you tribal leaders who are present to consult with Dr. Kelly regarding the activities of the Institute and on ways in which you can establish channels of communication with Indian tribes in other American countries.

Finally, we come to unity between Indians and non-Indian people living in nearby areas. I fear this adjustment will long continue to be more puzzling than the two we have previously discussed, mainly because most non-Indians, even including those of good will and the best intentions, expect all the changes or concessions to be made by the opposite group. Perhaps in a society as dynamic and domineering as ours this attitude is inevitable and unchangeable. After all, while in this country we are increasingly concerned with minority rights, we remain very much dedicated to the principle of majority rule.

In this dilemma, what can the concerned citizen do to promote unity, friendship and understanding across the invisible barriers still existing between Indians and non-Indians? I think Dr. Vogt may have an answer for us. In his discussion of cultural change among the Navaho to which I have already referred, he makes this significant point:

> The Spanish never succeeded in bringing the Navahos under their control, except on retaliatory punitive expeditions which affected only a few Navahos at a time. The only real attempts at conscious and directed change were the missionary endeavors of 1629 and 1746-50, and these efforts to carry out programs of 'reduction' and conversion were short-lived. In the Anglo-American Period, more change again seems to have resulted when the contact conditions were permissive rather than forced. The application of force at Fort Sumner did eliminate the raiding complex from Navaho culture, but all other crucial patterns appear to have remained the same. The general point is that basic change was, on the whole, more impressive and more lasting when new cultural models were presented to the Navahos without any attempt to force them to accept the new patterns.

I would not conclude, however, by leaving the impression that few bridges are being built between the Indian community and the non-Indians. Many, of course, are being built and many are already in full use. This conference is itself a demonstration of understanding, friendship and unity of purpose. More than half of all Indian children are now attending public schools. Indian mothers and fathers serve on public school boards in their neighborhoods, and many more are members of Parent-Teacher Associations. The availability of free education to every American child, irrespective of race or religion, has long been, and today remains, the greatest single unifying force in the country.

You or I could name numerous Indians who have achieved distinction in modern American society. A few who immediately come to mind are

Congressman Ben Reifel, a Sioux, of South Dakota; Napoleon B. Johnson, a Cherokee, Chief Justice of the State of Oklahoma, and his associate on the State Supreme Court, Judge Earl Welch, a Chickasaw; and Maria Tallchief, an Osage Indian, who is perhaps the leading American ballerina. While on this subject, I would like to pay a small tribute to the scholarship and literary skill of Miss Muriel H. Wright, a Choctaw of Oklahoma, who is now recognized as one of the leading historians of the American West. Her *"Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma"*, published in 1951 by the Oklahoma University Press, has gone through numerous reprintings, becoming the standard handbook of information on the many tribes which were removed to and settled in Indian Territory in the 19th century.

But, you may say, such Indians are exceptional rather than the rule. True, but it is equally true that the educational level of our rank-and-file Indians, low as it still is, is constantly rising; more and more are registering and voting in state and national elections; and more and more are participating personally in the business and civic activities of their reservation areas.

I know from my personal experience in Washington that many Indians have learned the art of writing their Congressman and practice it frequently. Commendable as is this interest in national affairs, I cannot help wishing occasionally that a few of them would exhibit a similar zeal in correspondence with governors and other state and local officials!

The barriers of misunderstanding between the Indian and the white man stand highest, I think we will all concede, in the communities just outside the reservations. There are hard historicial and sociological reasons for the rise of these barriers and it will take a long time to bring them down. Indeed, so long as the Indian insists on preserving his Indian-ness, and the white man insists that all Americans conform completely to his conception of the good life, differences and misunderstandings will probably persist and we may never attain fully the unity we sometimes dream of.

Oliver LaFarge once wrote: "Although there are many individual exceptions, the deeply embedded desire of most Indians is to prove themselves *whole* men in *our* world without ceasing to be Indians." As an American who takes some pride in his European ancestry, I, for one at least, am willing and glad to go along with that compromise.